

I will yield to the gentleman from Michigan [Mr. HOEKSTRA] to close, if he would like.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. What we have found as we have gone across the country is schools, where they are working, where they have done a good job with the children, are those where there is local parental control, not where Washington is dictating the agenda.

This is about where are education decisions for our children going to be made. Is the direction going to be at the local level, or is it going to be moved to Washington, DC? All we have to do is go around the country, take a look at the grass-roots level. We will be surprised at the wonderful things that are going on in all types of education, public, private, parochial, religious education efforts. But it is because of grass roots, not because of what we are doing here in Washington.

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Moving to national testing is moving more decision making to Washington away from the very people that are making a difference in our kids' lives today. We need to begin a process of moving power and money back to parents and the local school districts, not continuing on this trend of moving it to Washington. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for this special order.

Mr. SHADEGG. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for joining me. I want to conclude by saying that national testing is one of those ideas where the proponents believe that Washington knows best and I suggest they are wrong. Washington does not know best how to educate your children in your school or my children in my school. You can do it better.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to help us to reject the idea of national testing, which would give too much responsibility to Washington and take too much away from the parents and their child's teacher.

PLUTONIUM POWER SOURCE PROVEN SAFE ON NASA PROBE TO SATURN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHIMKUS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. WELDON] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WELDON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the recent Cassini mission to Saturn. This was a successful launch on a Titan launch vehicle that left Cape Canaveral a week ago tomorrow morning. Actually, it was 4 a.m. on Wednesday. It was a mission that garnered a lot of publicity, primarily because the probe, this deep space probe that was going to one of the moons of Saturn, it is a moon called Titan, it had a plutonium power source on it. The source of electricity to run all the computers and the sensors on this satellite, this probe, was

plutonium, and as everybody knows, plutonium is radioactive and it is dangerous.

Mr. Speaker, as soon as I heard about this mission 6 months ago or so and I knew it was going to be going off, I immediately had some of the leaders of the Cassini program from NASA come into my office and brief me, because I live in that area and I remember very well the controversy surrounding the Galileo mission. I am sure many Americans remember the Galileo mission, which was a mission to Jupiter, and we had a probe that went into the Jupiter atmosphere. It was a very successful mission and got a lot of publicity.

So 5 years ago when that mission was taking off, at that time there was a lot of controversy as well about the plutonium power source. I was also concerned because I live in the area, my wife and daughter live in the area, my father lives in the area, all of my friends live in the area. So I wanted to find out the facts on this issue, and I was actually very disappointed to see, they never really came out in any of the press coverage on the Cassini mission.

The plutonium that they use to power these vehicles is plutonium that has been solidified in a ceramic. It is encased in metal and it has essentially been tested and tested and tested so that it can withstand a disaster. And indeed I discovered on my research on this issue that actually at one point there was a mission that failed on the launch pad and the rocket blew up with the plutonium on board. It was out in California at Vandenberg Air Force Base. And not only did the plutonium power source, they call it an RTG power source, not only did it not break up and spill plutonium into the atmosphere, they were actually able to clean the thing up and put it on another satellite, it was constructed so well to withstand the blast.

The other issue that there has been some concern about is that this thing could reenter the atmosphere and in the process of burning up, that it would release all of this plutonium into the atmosphere. And they have also designed the plutonium power source so that if it does reenter the atmosphere, it has a casing around it and the casing absorbs the heat and it never actually burns up.

Indeed, I found out that plutonium RTG's were actually on the Apollo mission, and Apollo 13, when it reentered the atmosphere, there were plutonium RTG's on the Apollo 13, and they survived the reentry and there was no release of plutonium into the atmosphere.

The bottom line is here that the engineers, the men and women who designed this power source, and it has been used 26 times safely on various missions, and as well they use the same technology in Russia and they have used it on many missions. It is designed to withstand an explosion on the launch pad without releasing any

plutonium into the atmosphere, and it is designed to reenter if there were an accident and it were to fall back to Earth and not burn up and not release any plutonium into the atmosphere.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point is basically this. They have designed it so that it is safe and there is no way, if one talks to these scientists there is no way that we could send probes out to Jupiter, out to Saturn, to those outer planets, without this power source.

People will say, well we can use solar. The solar rays are so weak when probes get that far out from the sun that we would have to have a solar array as big as the State of New Jersey to drive this probe. It is impossible to do that.

Well, it turned out the mission went off successfully. It was a successful launch. Cassini is on its way to Titan and it is going to yield valuable scientific information. The news media did a disservice and the scare tactics did not work, and I congratulate NASA.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 97, FURTHER CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 1998

Mr. MCINNIS (during the special order of the gentleman from New York, Mr. OWENS) submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 105-333) on the resolution (H. Res. 269) providing for consideration of the joint resolution (H. J. Res. 97) making further continuing appropriations for the fiscal year 1998, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 2247, AMTRAK REFORM AND PRIVATIZATION ACT OF 1997

Mr. MCINNIS (during the special order of the gentleman from New York, Mr. OWENS) submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 105-334) on the resolution (H. Res. 270) providing for the consideration of the bill (H. R. 2247) to reform the statutes relating to Amtrak, to authorize appropriations for Amtrak, and for other purposes, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 1534, PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION ACT OF 1997

Mr. MCINNIS (during the special order of the gentleman from New York, Mr. OWENS) submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 105-335) on the resolution (H. Res. 271) providing for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 1534) to simplify and expedite access to the Federal courts for injured parties whose rights and privileges, secured by the United